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# Being a Parent or Having a Parent? The Perceived Employability of Men and Women Who Take Employment Leave

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**Julie A. Kmec<sup>1</sup>, Matt L. Huffman<sup>2</sup>, and Andrew M. Penner<sup>2</sup>**

## **Abstract**

We explore one way family caregiving shapes inequality at work by analyzing the evaluations of men and women who took employment leave to care for a newborn or elderly parents or to recover from a personal injury. Roughly 500 undergraduate students evaluated the employability, qualifications, responsibility, and adherence to leave policies of a fictitious applicant for a professional job. Evaluators rated fathers and male elder caregivers as the most employable. This advantage was not explained by evaluators' thinking that fathers and male elder caregivers were qualified, responsible, and policy abiding, suggesting the operation of taste discrimination. Likewise, accounting for these factors widens the gap in perceived employability between male and female noncaregivers. We discuss what these findings reveal about the family-work link as well as their methodological and policy implications.

## **Keywords**

family caregiving, employment leave, gender, perceived employability

Gender inequality has declined in the last half century, albeit unevenly and at a slowing pace (see England, 2010). One area where gender inequality remains entrenched is at work; women remain segregated from men (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2006), face a substantial net gender pay gap (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2004), and continue to

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lack access to the highest levels of workplace authority (Catalyst, 2009). The stability of workplace gender inequality stems, in part, from how women's and men's family participation differently shapes their economic roles. For example, most women experience a penalty—and most men a premium—in employability, pay, promotion, and workplace evaluation when they marry and become parents (see Benard & Correll, 2010; Budig & Hodges, 2010; Hodges & Budig, 2010). Motherhood employment penalties stem from the stereotypical notion that motherhood and femininity are antithetical to productive work in the labor market (see Benard & Correll 2010; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Hays, 1996; J. Williams, 2001). In contrast, fatherhood employment premia are rooted in bonuses for masculinity and the “ideal” worker traits signaled by fatherhood (Coltrane, 2004; Correll et al., 2007).<sup>1</sup>

From our perspective, empirical research on the gendered ways that family caregiving responsibilities shape workers' economic value suffers from a significant shortcoming. Most studies conflate parenting with caregiving, yet cultural assumptions about the economic behaviors of mothers and fathers are markedly different. In the United States, the mainstream view is that family caretaking is a “woman's job,” while economic support of the family is a man's responsibility. A stereotypically “good” mother is supposed to provide family care, but a “good” father is supposed to increase his breadwinning capacity following childbirth (see Connell, 1995; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012; Raley, Bianchi, & Wang, 2012; Townsend, 2002). Thus, upon becoming a parent, women are assumed to have an increase in caregiving, while men may not be expected to do so.

Given these assumptions, it is unclear if the premia and penalties associated with parenthood are unique to parenthood or if they are characteristic of caregiving more generally. For example, it is unclear whether men who take employment leave to provide family caregiving that does not necessarily symbolize masculinity or imply an increased commitment to breadwinning would encounter a workplace penalty. Likewise, we do not know whether women would experience a penalty similar to the motherhood penalty for taking employment leave that is not linked to motherhood.

Empirical research investigating the relationship between employment outcomes and family caregiving also tends to contrast men and women who take employment leave with those who do not (for an exception, see Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). These studies show that employment leave for caregiving, even when guaranteed by federal law, negatively affects men's evaluation and career outcomes (Wayne & Cordiero, 2003) and female and male managers' career outcomes (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999). What studies comparing leave-takers with non-leave-takers cannot do, however, is determine whether employers penalize leave-taking itself, a sign a worker is less than “ideal” (J. Williams, 2001), or the mere act of caregiving.

To address these important issues, a comparison of the workplace evaluation of women and men—all of whom take leave, some for parental reasons, some for other family caregiving reasons, and some for noncaregiving reasons—is required. By doing so, we report new findings on how family participation affects the perceived economic value of women and men.

To this end, we explore the connection between women's and men's perceived employability and employment leave-taking for two types of family caregiving, parenting and elder caregiving, and a non-family-related reason, having a temporary injury. We also analyze factors that may explain differences in perceived employability among men and women in the different employment leave categories. Specifically, we ask the following: (a) Does the reason for taking an employment leave affect a job applicant's perceived employability? (b) How does this differ by applicant sex? and (c) How do perceptions of job qualification, responsibility, and adherence to leave policies contribute to differences in the perceived employability of parents, elder caregivers, and noncaregivers of both sexes?

To answer these questions, we analyze the assessment of fictitious job applicants by roughly 500 mostly White undergraduate students enrolled in a large, public research university. We manipulated both men's and women's leave type (leave for parenting, elder care, or personal injury) so that all job applicants took some form of leave from work. To address our first set of research questions, we compare assessments of the employability of female and male family caregivers and noncaregivers. We answer our second research question by estimating generalized ordered logistic models to investigate if and how being perceived as having the attributes that employers typically reward—being qualified, being responsible, and adhering to leave policies—explains the connection between sex, caregiver status, and perceived employability. We pay particular attention to whether worker traits account for or exacerbate bonuses or penalties in perceived employability.

Investigating women's and men's parenting *and* elder-caregiving behaviors allows us to separate deeply rooted cultural ideologies about women's and men's parenting roles from gender stereotypes, illuminating what drives men's workplace advantages over women. Women's parenting roles in the United States are shaped by what Hays (1996) has identified as an "ideology of intensive mothering," which posits that mothers should spend a substantial amount of time and energy raising children. This ideology also suggests that motherhood is a proxy for being a poor worker. For men, on the other hand, beliefs about fatherhood in the United States are shaped by a norm of "economic fatherhood," implying that fathers are responsible for the economic support of their children (see Dowd, 2000). Consequently, fatherhood signals masculinity and dedication to one's job, promoting a belief that fathers are ideal workers. By contrast, among men, elder caregiving is not necessarily a signal of masculinity or economic provision. Likewise, among women, elder caregiving is a form of family caregiving not necessarily imbued with cultural assumptions of intensive mothering. By looking side-by-side at perceived employability and the connection between perceived worker traits and employability of female and male elder caregivers and mothers and fathers, we can disentangle deeply held cultural assumptions about fathers and mothers that affect their perceived value in the labor market. Thus, our analyses help us identify whether there is something particular about motherhood and fatherhood that shapes workers' economic value or whether similar processes hold for care work more generally.

## Theorizing About Gender, Caregiving, and Perceived Employability

Much of what we know about the family-work link stems from empirical investigations of employed mothers and fathers. This work suggests that employers reward some men and penalize some women in terms of employability and other employment outcomes for being parents (for recent discussions, see Benard & Correll, 2010; Raley et al., 2012). Overall, fatherhood signals work commitment to employers, while motherhood has the opposite effect. The gendered view of what parenthood means for worker commitment then advantages most fathers while it disadvantages most mothers (Budig & England, 2001; Glauber, 2007, 2008). “Economic fatherhood” arguments suggest that men are responsible for the economic well-being of their families. As recently as the 1970s, U.S. courts perpetuated the idea of economic fatherhood by writing laws that included sex-based assumptions about breadwinning and caregiving. For example, prior to 1975, federal law provided Social Security survivor benefits for widows regardless of their dependency on their husbands but only for widowers who could prove prior financial dependency on their wives (Bornstein, 2012). Likewise, federal policies were aimed at strengthening families by helping fathers focus on fathers’ roles as financial providers rather than as caregivers (cf. Weaver, 2012). This research suggests that we should find a *fatherhood bonus* such that fathers are perceived as more employable than men and women who are not parents and a *motherhood penalty* such that mothers are viewed as less employable.

### *Unpacking Fatherhood Bonuses and Motherhood Penalties in Employment*

To understand fatherhood bonuses and motherhood penalties, it is also important to consider men and women in nonparenting caregiving roles and those without family caregiving responsibilities. This is because labor market differences between fathers and mothers may simply reflect a male advantage—and a female disadvantage—in the U.S. labor market. The paid labor system is built on masculine norms that place men at the top of employers’ hiring queues (see Acker, 1990; C. Williams, 1995). Employers see able-bodied men as ideal workers who are dedicated, are willing to work long hours, sacrifice for the good of the employer, and have few interruptions from home stemming from childbearing or childrearing (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Hochschild, 1997; J. Williams, 2001). Subsequently, employers tend to evaluate and reward men higher than women (Budig, 2002; Kaufman, 2010; C. Williams, 1995). The *male advantage* perspective suggests that men with any type of family caregiving role (e.g., fathers, male elder caregivers), as well as men without family caregiving responsibilities, are more employable than women regardless of their family caregiving responsibilities.

Alternatively, fatherhood premiums and motherhood penalties may reflect broader *male family provider* and *female family caregiver* assumptions. This is because cultural assumptions about fatherhood and motherhood might apply not only to fathers

**Table 1.** Summary of Empirical Evidence Supporting the Gender–Caregiving–Perceived Employability Relationship.

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Fatherhood bonus        | Fathers are perceived as being more employable than all other men and women.   |
| Motherhood penalty      | Mothers are perceived as being less employable than all other women and men.   |
| Male advantage          | Men, regardless of their family caregiving responsibilities, are perceived as being more employable than all women.            |
| Male family provider    | Fathers and male elder caregivers are perceived as being more employable than men without family responsibilities and women.   |
| Female family caregiver | Mothers and female elder caregivers are perceived as being less employable than women without family responsibilities and men. |

and mothers but also to men and women with familial responsibilities more generally. To the degree that this holds, ideas about fathers needing to provide financially for families and mothers needing to provide care for families might also affect perceptions of male and female elder caregivers' employability. Thus, according to the male family provider perspective, we would expect fathers and male elder caregivers to be perceived as more employable than all others, while according to the female family caregiver perspective, we would expect mothers and female elder caregivers to be seen as less employable than all others. Table 1 summarizes the empirical evidence needed to support the four perspectives on how gender, caregiving, and perceived employability might be linked.

### *Employer Discrimination*

Our analysis also illuminates the type of discrimination workers, especially mothers, face. At the hiring stage, employers can engage in taste discrimination—exercising a preference toward, or displeasure for, members of a certain social group. Applied here, theories of taste discrimination would suggest that even when an applicant demonstrates competence, she or he will not be employable. Alternatively, employers can engage in statistical discrimination against job applicants when they assume an applicant shares the negative (or positive) attributes of a group (e.g., fathers or mothers) to which he or she belongs (see Baumlee & Fossett, 2005). Theories of statistical discrimination would suggest that employers, faced with incomplete information about job applicants, assume an applicant has the characteristics that are supposedly true of the group to which her or she belongs (e.g., mothers are often late to work; therefore all job applicants who are mothers will frequently be late to work). Our analyses can indicate which of these two forms of hiring discrimination is likely to be at work; if an applicant's perceived employability is not explained by perceptions of qualifications, responsibility, or leave-taking policy adherence, the findings are in line with theories of taste discrimination. The findings are more in line with theories of statistical discrimination if we find, for example, that accounting for these work attributes

minimizes the negative association between motherhood and employability (e.g., a decrease in the “motherhood” coefficient, net of these attributes).

## **Method**

### *Research Design*

To answer our research questions, we used a between-subject experimental design in which participants evaluated a résumé and cover letter for a professional job. The independent variables included the applicant’s sex (male or female) and family caregiver status (parent, elder caregiver, or noncaregiver). The outcome measures consisted of participants’ ratings of the applicant’s employability. Participants were 509 nonpaid, predominantly White undergraduate students at a large, public research university. Students were volunteers from two large undergraduate sociology courses and participated for extra credit. Student participants were a mix of male and female freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors and of traditional college age (18 to 21 years old).

### *Procedure and Materials*

At the start of each class, participants were read a script indicating that a professor on campus was conducting a study of employment and they could help by participating. After providing informed consent, participants were given a packet, including (a) a half-page job description of a professional job, organizational development consultant;<sup>2</sup> (b) the applicant’s cover letter; (c) the fictitious applicant’s one-page résumé written explicitly to display ample qualification for the target job; and (d) a two-page survey assessing various employment-related characteristics about the applicant.

These materials were identical across conditions, except that we varied the fictitious applicant’s first name to manipulate the sex category and the cover letter to manipulate caregiver status (see the appendix). Participants were asked to read the materials and complete the two-page survey. We manipulated applicants’ sex by using names unambiguously associated with men or women in the United States: Jennifer for women and George for men. Male and female applicants shared the same last name, Belson (see the appendix). We specifically chose these names to sound White and middle class, so as not to conflate issues of race and class.<sup>3</sup> Caregiver status was manipulated in the second paragraph of a three-paragraph, single-page cover letter. There, we indicated that the applicant took 4 months of leave from a job to either care for a newborn son (parent condition), move elderly parents closer in order to assist them with their needs as they age (elder caregiver condition), or recover from an injury (the noncaregiving control group). Shortly after completing the survey, participants were asked to indicate what they had noticed about the applicant packet they had just evaluated. Seventy-seven percent of evaluators mentioned that the applicant took a 4-month leave, suggesting that participants noticed the condition and that we are indeed capturing their assessment of a woman or man engaged in family caregiving or noncaregiving roles.



We are aware of the potential limitations of using an undergraduate sample for analysis and so caution that our analysis should not be interpreted as providing the definitive word on this issue. Nevertheless, we think that our approach offers insight into common perceptions of men and women caregivers and noncaregivers. Previous research, including meta-analyses, suggests that undergraduate and professional samples are not systematically different (see Cleveland, 1991; Cleveland & Berman, 1987; Olian, Schwab, & Haberfeld, 1988). Of particular relevance to our study, Heilman and Okimoto (2008) reported similar levels of motherhood bias in a sample of college undergraduates and a sample of business employees with considerable hiring experience. Finally, we echo Güngör and Biernat (2009) in noting that undergraduate students are perhaps more liberal overall than community samples but are not immune to gendered beliefs about workplace competence. Importantly to the degree that undergraduate students are in fact more liberal than hiring managers, our sample provides a conservative test of our research questions. Nonetheless, we believe that additional research with hiring managers is needed.

An additional limitation of our data is the lack of information on the sex of the evaluators, which might influence ratings of caregivers. For example, Wayne and Cordeiro (2003) found that male evaluators have a slight bias against men who take work leave for birth, child illness, and parent illness (relative to men who did not take leave and women who took leave for the same reasons). Although our data do not permit us to do so, future research exploring applicant hire outcomes and workplace behaviors should consider how the sex of the evaluator interacts with various worker characteristics to shape ratings and evaluations.

## Measures

**Dependent variable.** Our key dependent variable measures participants' perceptions of the hypothetical job applicants' employability. We asked the extent to which evaluators agreed with the statement: "[I] would hire this job applicant based on their résumé alone." Responses are coded as follows: 5 = *strongly agree* (10.89%), 4 = *agree* (30.04%), 3 = *neutral* (27.22%), 2 = *disagree* (26.21%), and 1 = *strongly disagree* (5.65%). For ease of comparison across six sex-caregiving statuses, we collapsed the outcome into three categories: *agree* (*strongly agree* and *agree*), *neutral*, and *disagree* (*disagree* and *strongly disagree*). Findings (not shown) are similar with a five-category outcome.

### Independent variables

**Sex-caregiver status.** Measures of an applicant's sex-caregiver status compose our primary independent variables. Specifically, we classify applicants as either a father, male elder caregiver, male noncaregiver, mother, female elder caregiver, or female noncaregiver. For the multivariate analyses, male noncaregiver is the reference category, so coefficients on the sex-caregiver status categories are the odds of the outcome relative to men without a family caregiving role. Recall that the male and female noncaregivers also took an employment leave (due to an injury). It is important for

the control group to take an employment leave in order to accurately capture whether penalties accrue simply because the leave-taking departs from institutionalized norms about work (Albiston, 2010) or if penalties arise from being a caregiver. We discuss implications for comparing parenting and elder-caregiving leave-taking to leave-taking for an injury in the conclusion.

*Predictors of perceived employability.* Our second analysis includes evaluators' rating of 15 "ideal" work characteristics of the fictitious job applicants.<sup>4</sup> We used exploratory factor analysis with orthogonal rotation to identify the number of dimensions underlying our measurement of "ideal" worker traits. This confirmed that the variables load onto three factors. We call the first factor "perceived job qualification." It includes seven measures of the extent to which the evaluator thinks the applicant: (a) is qualified for the target job, (b) exceeds qualifications for the target job, (c) will be as flexible with job duties as required, (d) will be productive immediately, (e) has enough experience for target job, (f) ranks as highly qualified for the job, and (g) can be counted on to perform duties of the job adequately. This factor explains 32% of the total variance. The second factor, which explains 10% of the total variance, taps an applicant's "perceived responsibility" and includes six measures of the extent to which the evaluator thinks the applicant (a) is responsible, (b) is professional, (c) will show up on time, (d) is trustworthy, (e) is reliable, and (f) is a quick learner. Finally, the third factor taps "perceived adherence to employment leave policy" and comprises two measures indicating the extent to which the evaluator thinks an applicant (a) took an acceptable amount of leave in the past and (b) will not abuse company leave policies in the future. The third factor explains 7% of the total variance.

## Models

To address our first research question regarding the perceived employability of applicants, we produce a chi-square statistic to compare the average perceived employability ratings of applicants in the six sex-caregiver status categories. To address the second question, about the factors that contribute to differences in the perceived employability of parents, elder caregivers, and noncaregivers of both sexes, we estimated generalized ordered logistic (GOL) regression models describing the relationship between perceived employability and perceived worker attribute factors. The equation we estimate is

$$P(Y_i > j) = \text{Logit}(\beta_0 + \sum \beta_k X_k), j = 1, 2, m$$

where  $m$  is the number of categories of the ordinal dependent variable, in our case, three (*agree, neutral, disagree*). For  $j = 2$ , Category 3 is contrasted with Categories 1 and 2. For  $j = 1$ , Categories 2 and 3 are contrasted with Category 1 (R. Williams, 2006). Preliminary analyses revealed that ordered logistic regression analysis violates the proportional odds assumption, making GOL regression analysis the appropriate method. GOL regression produces estimates for different dichotomizations of the

**Table 2.** Perceived Employability by Sex-Caregiver Status and Type.

| Sex-Caregiver Status   | Evaluator Would Hire the Job Applicant Based on Résumé Alone |          |         |        |       |
|------------------------|--|----------|---------|--------|-------|
|                        | <i>n</i>   | Disagree | Neutral | Agree  | Total |
| Men                    |  |          |         |        |       |
| Father                 | 84   | 29.67%   | 20.24%  | 50.00% | 100%  |
| Male elder caregiver   | 83   | 25.92%   | 20.99%  | 53.09% | 100%  |
| Male noncaregiver      | 89   | 28.69%   | 39.08%  | 32.19% | 100%  |
| Women                  |  |          |         |        |       |
| Mother                 | 88   | 27.06%   | 35.29%  | 37.11% | 100%  |
| Female elder caregiver | 80   | 39.74%   | 23.08%  | 37.18% | 100%  |
| Female noncaregiver    | 83   | 40.74%   | 23.46%  | 35.81% | 100%  |

Note. Pearson  $\chi^2 = 22.78$ ,  $df = 10$ ,  $p = .012$ .

outcome: (a) agreeing versus being neutral or disagreeing to hire an applicant on this basis of his or her resume alone, which we refer to as strong support for an applicant's employability, and (b) agreeing or being neutral versus disagreeing to hire an applicant on the basis of his or her resume alone, which we refer to as at least moderate support. In both dichotomizations, higher values indicate higher odds of perceived employability, although the second dichotomization constitutes a weaker perceived employability rating because it combines the *agree to hire* and *neutral* categories.

We first estimate a baseline model, which regresses perceived employability on the sex-caregiver status categories (reference category = male noncaregivers). The second model includes the factor scores tapping three positive work traits: perceived job qualification, perceived responsibility, and perceived adherence to employment leave policies.

## Results

### *Family Caregiving Type and Women's and Men's Perceived Employability*

Our first set of research questions asked whether the reason for taking an employment leave affected job applicants' perceived employability and how, if at all, this differed by applicant sex. Table 2 presents the perceived employability ratings of women and men in either a family caregiving role (elder caregiver or parent) or a noncaregiving role. These results reveal important differences in the perceived employability of women and men with family caregiving responsibilities but also notable variation across family caregiving type. Fathers and male elder caregivers have similar perceived employability, as 50% of evaluators agree to hire a father and 53% agree that they would hire a male elder caregiver. The share who would hire male elder caregivers is significantly larger than the share would who hire male noncaregivers (32%,

$p = .04$ ), female elder caregivers (37%,  $p = .04$ ), mothers (37%,  $p = .03$ ), or female noncaregivers (36%,  $p = .02$ ). As such, Table 2 suggests support for the family provider theory (see Table 1). On average, men with parenting and elder caregiving responsibilities are perceived as being more employable than both men without family caregiving responsibilities and women. In contrast, we find no evidence of a family provider advantage among women.

In fact, among women, we find some evidence suggesting the absence of the well-documented motherhood penalty, as mothers' perceived employability is seen as relatively neutral to somewhat positive compared to other women. Among those evaluating a mother, 27% disagree she should be hired, 35% are neutral with regard to her employability, while 37% think that she should be hired. By contrast, female elder caregivers and female noncaregivers are the most strongly penalized: Of those rating a female elder caregiver, approximately 40% disagree they would hire her, while about 41% disagree they would hire a female noncaregiver. These are the lowest rates of perceived employability, even lower than that of mothers, although the differences with mothers are not statistically significant (mother–female elder caregiver difference,  $p = .29$ , and mother–female noncaregivers difference,  $p = .21$ ). This finding is somewhat surprising given previous work documenting substantial penalties for mothers. We return to this point in our discussion and offer some ideas for why our results might differ from previous findings.

### *Factors Affecting the Perceived Employability of Parents, Elder Caregivers, and Noncaregivers*

Our first analysis demonstrated that the perceived employability of men and women depends on both their status as a family caregiver and the type of caregiving they provide, and the pattern of results we found provided support for the male family provider perspective. We now turn to analyses of the factors that shape differences in the perceived employability of male and female parents, elder caregivers, and noncaregivers. These results, based on GOL models, are presented in Table 3.

Here, the baseline model (Model A) explores the relationship between an applicant's sex and caregiver status and his or her perceived employability. Specifically, we examine the odds that the rater would agree that the candidate was employable versus disagreeing or being neutral. We refer to this as exhibiting strong support for the applicant's perceived employability. This model echoes the findings from Table 2, showing that evaluators perceive fathers and male elder caregivers as significantly more employable than male noncaregivers (the reference category). The odds of fathers' perceived employability are roughly twice the odds of men without family caregiving responsibilities (odds ratio = 1.97), while the odds of male elder caregivers' perceived employability are over twice those of men without family caregiving responsibilities (odds ratio = 2.33). In the baseline model, we find no statistically significant difference between the perceived employability of mothers, female elder caregivers, and women without caregiving responsibilities relative to male caregivers.

**Table 3.** Odds Ratios From Generalized Ordered Logistic Regression of Perceived Employability on Sex-Caregiver Status and Worker Attributes.

| Variable                              | Strong Support for Job Applicant's Employability <sup>a</sup> |                | At Least Moderate Support for Job Applicant's Employability <sup>b</sup> |                |
|---------------------------------------|---|----------------|--|----------------|
|                                       | A   | B              | C  | D              |
| Sex-caregiver status                  |   |                |  |                |
| Father                                | 1.97* (0.62)  | 1.98+ (0.79)   | 0.92 (0.31)  | 0.64 (0.28)    |
| Male elder caregiver                  | 2.33** (0.73)   | 2.12+ (0.83)   | 1.15 (0.40)  | 0.94 (0.43)    |
| Male noncaregiver (reference)         | —   | —              | —  | —              |
| Mother                                | 1.30 (0.41)   | 0.98 (0.39)    | 1.10 (0.37)  | 0.66 (0.29)    |
| Female elder caregiver                | 1.24 (0.40)   | 0.90 (0.37)    | 0.62 (0.20)  | 0.50 (0.22)    |
| Female noncaregiver                   | 1.17 (0.37)   | 0.61 (0.25)    | 0.59+ (0.19)   | 0.34* (0.15)   |
| Worker attributes                     |   |                |  |                |
| Perceived qualification               |   | 2.20*** (0.29) |  | 1.70*** (0.22) |
| Perceived responsibility              |   | 1.75*** (0.22) |  | 1.70*** (0.24) |
| Perceived adherence to leave policies |   | 1.12 (0.14)    |  | 1.17 (0.15)    |
| Log likelihood                        | −537.04   | −339.98        | −537.04  | −339.98        |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                 | 0.019   | 0.1123         | 0.019  | 0.1123         |
| n                                     | 507   | 357            | 507  | 357            |

Note. Standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>Models predict agreement versus neutral or disagree responses. <sup>b</sup>Models predict agreement or neutral response versus disagreement.

+ $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

The addition of three factors tapping job qualification, responsibility, and adherence to leave policies in Model B only slightly changes fathers' and male elder caregivers' perceived employability premium relative to male noncaregivers. Net of the perceived worker trait controls, fathers and male elder caregivers have marginally greater odds of perceived employability than male noncaregivers (i.e., differences are marginally significant,  $p < .10$ ). The addition of perceived worker traits does not change the relationship between the perceived employability of women, regardless of caregiver status, and male noncaregivers—all women remain as employable as male noncaregivers. In this model, the factors tapping perceived qualification and responsibility are significant predictors of perceived employability, while perceived adherence to employment leave policies is not. This suggests that these differences are potentially due to taste discrimination and not statistical discrimination, as with statistical discrimination, we would expect that controlling for these attributes would reduce the coefficients for fatherhood and male elder caregivers.

Models C and D display odds ratios for whether evaluators were at least moderately supportive of employability. Here we combine groups where evaluators agreed or

were neutral in their assessment of perceived employability and compare the odds of being in either of these groups to the odds that the evaluator disagreed that the applicant is employable. In models using this dichotomization of the outcome, we observe no significant difference in the perceived employability of fathers, male elder caregivers, or male noncaregivers (the reference category) in the baseline model (Model C) or in the model controlling for perceived work attribute factors (Model D). However, the odds that evaluators rated female noncaregivers as employable were lower than for male noncaregivers. In the baseline model (Model C), the odds of a female noncaregiver being rated employable are about 40% lower (odds ratio = 0.59) than those of a male noncaregiver, but the difference is only marginally significant ( $p < .10$ ). Net of controls for perceived qualification, responsibility, and adherence to leave policies, her perceived employment odds are about 65% lower (odds ratio = 0.34,  $p < .05$ ). This suggests that these worker traits might function as suppressor variables and that the gap net of these factors is actually larger than the overall effect. As with the findings from Models A and B, these results are consistent with taste discrimination.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This study makes several contributions to the literature on the origins of gender and family workplace inequality. The first contribution is to shed light on the family-work link by exploring the connection between men's and women's perceived employability across two types of family caregiving—parenting and elder caregiving—and noncaregiving. We expand on previous research by considering multiple forms of caregiving, showing that different types of caregiving have gendered implications for the labor market. Like much previous research, we find that men are perceived as more employable than women and that among men, fathers are seen as more employable than noncaregivers. However, we show that it is not only fathers who are advantaged but that all family caregivers are seen as more employable than noncaregivers. This is not the case among women. While we do find some evidence that mothers are advantaged relative to other women, there do not appear to be any differences between female elder caregivers and noncaregivers. These findings support the idea that men's advantage is more than a gender advantage; in fact, men's family caregiving roles enhance the assessment of their employability. Specifically, the results in Table 2 suggest a family provider premium among men; men with family caregiving roles—fathers and male elder caregivers alike—are rated as more employable than women and men without family caregiving responsibilities. The premium is not simply a reflection of masculinity embodied by fatherhood (see Hodges & Budig, 2010) since the employability premium extends to men who provide eldercare, which is not necessarily a sign of masculinity or a signal for increased breadwinning status.

We also examine the extent to which the various attributes ascribed to men with family caregiving responsibilities explains their employability premium. Results reported in Table 3 examine this by exploring whether perceived worker traits can explain the connection between sex-caregiver status and perceived employability. Among the three factors tapping perceived worker characteristics—job qualification,

responsibility, and adherence to leave policies—the first two are statistically significant predictors of perceived employability. However, controlling for these factors (see Table 3) does not substantially alter the magnitude of the difference in fathers' and male elder caregivers' perceived employability across models. That is, even net of controls for perceived job qualification, responsibility, and adherence to employment leave policies, men with family caregiving roles remain more favorably evaluated in terms of perceived employability than male noncaregivers, though the increase in the standard errors from introducing these additional variables means the effects are significant only at  $p < .10$ . The premium extends only to the "strong" support for employment model (Models A and B).

That fathers and male elder caregivers remain, albeit marginally, significantly more employable net of controls for perceived qualification, responsibility, and adherence to leave-taking (even when both have taken employment leave) suggests that the family provider bonus accrues to men largely independently of the traits that we measured. This is congruent with the idea that the male family provider bonus occurs due to taste discrimination, though it is also possible that there are differences in how evaluators view other (unmeasured) workplace relevant characteristics.

Interestingly, although the decrease in fathers' and male elder caregivers' employment premium due to introducing controls for positive worker traits is minimal, for female noncaregivers, adding controls for perceived positive worker attributes brings into sharper relief their marginal position relative to male noncaregivers (see Models C and D, Table 3). That female noncaregivers are penalized net of their perceived positive traits suggests evidence of taste discrimination on part of evaluators, and in particular, a "distaste" for women who take employment leave for a temporary personal injury rather than a family-related reason. Since the penalty against female noncaregivers is not explained by perceptions of their qualifications, responsibility, or leave-taking policy adherence, and accounting for these perceived characteristics actually *decreases* their employability, the findings are less in line with theories of statistical discrimination against women.

We also found that while mothers are roughly equally as likely to be perceived as being employable as women with elder caregiving duties and female noncaregivers, they are not viewed as less employable than male noncaregivers and are more likely to be viewed neutrally than are other women. This divergence from past findings could be a reflection of the fact that our study design equalized leave-taking across candidates.<sup>5</sup> By assigning leave-taking to all men and women, we compare parents of both sexes who took family leave, elder caregivers who did so, and workers without caregiving responsibilities who also took leave. Previous studies identifying a motherhood wage penalty do not always depict mothers and fathers as taking leave, nor do they typically compare parents to a control group that has taken leave. In so doing, previous research may have conflated motherhood with employment leave-taking and fatherhood (and the control group) with an absence of it. As we observe here, when all workers take leave, we do not observe a motherhood penalty. While our design does not allow us to compare leave-takers to non-leave-takers, we believe that the key contrast for isolating the gap attributable to motherhood compares mothers and nonmothers



who have all taken similar amounts of leave. Thus, we interpret our findings as suggesting that the motherhood gap observed in other studies may actually be a leave-taking gap. Granted, to the degree that motherhood entails leave-taking, leave-taking can be viewed as the mechanism through which the motherhood gap operates. However, to the degree that this is the case, we argue that future work on the motherhood penalty should focus less on motherhood in particular and more on the stigma associated with leave-taking for women broadly.<sup>6</sup> This is consistent with research suggesting that all leaves of absence, regardless of the reason for them (family responsibilities or illness), were associated with significantly worse labor market outcomes (Judiesch & Lynness, 1999).

We also indicated that the parents took employment leave in the past to care for a newborn son. Listing the child as a male may have implications for the evaluation of fathers. Fathers increase their work hours after the arrival of children into their household, but the increase tends to be significantly greater when the child is a son (no similar effect was present for mothers; Choi, Joesch, & Lundberg, 2005; Lundberg & Rose, 2002). If evaluators believe that fathers with sons display an even greater tendency to display "ideal" worker attributes, we may be inflating the positive effects of fatherhood. Of course, this design feature has no impact on similar the positive evaluations of male elder caregivers because evaluators rated only one applicant's file.

Despite these limitations, our analyses are among the first to compare employment leave-takers engaged in different types of family caregiving, and they offer insight into the working of the family-economic link. We draw three major conclusions from our analyses. First, as demonstrated in Table 2, among men, any type of family caregiving yields an employability premium. Raters who evaluated the cover letter of men who indicated that they have no family caretaking responsibilities are significantly less likely to rate those men as employable than they are fathers or male elder caregivers, and these men, if anything, fell slightly below all three groups of women. These findings lend support to the idea that the fatherhood bonus is more than male advantage; instead, the fatherhood bonus is a form of advantage men receive from being in a family provider role.

The similar perceived employability ratings of fathers and male elder caregivers who both take employment leave suggests men may not suffer from normative discrimination, a form of sex discrimination that occurs to individuals who violate stereotypical assumptions of sex-typical behaviors (Benard & Correll, 2010). At work, normative discrimination bias arises when an employer penalizes a worker for behavior that is inconsistent with what is thought to be appropriate for their sex. In the United States, it is often assumed that men should work for pay, be committed to paid work, and be assertive, dominant, assertive, intelligent, and independent. In contrast, women should be dependent, nurturing, passive, and primarily concerned with family and children (Heilman, 2001). Although some previous research has found that men who take employment leave for family reasons, and hence violate normative assumptions of men, were penalized more than men who did not take family leave and women who took leave (Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003), men in our sample are not penalized for taking on roles not necessarily "expected" of them. In short, when compared to men



who took leave for an injury, men gain an advantage at work by having family caregiving duties and their family provider roles that advantage men.

Instead of normative discrimination, our findings from Table 2 suggest that “nurturing” men are rewarded. This might reflect, in part, the particular views of a college-aged sample. Blakemore, Baumgardner, and Keniston (1988) found that college students value nurturing behaviors in both women and men because they tend to be less restricted by society’s notions of gender compared to adults not in college. The male “nurturing” reward may also reflect the assumptions evaluators have about what caregiving tasks demonstrate about a man’s work qualities. Evaluators may believe family caregiving responsibilities require skills such as the ability to multitask, prioritize, manage conflict, and be efficient, skills that enhance ones’ employability. Further, to the degree that men are stereotypically assumed to be competent but are seen as rational and insensitive (cf. Prentice & Carranza, 2002; C. Williams, 1995), their caregiving might be interpreted as indicating that they are caring and possess “soft” skills (Moss & Tilly, 1996). Future research should investigate whether fathers receive caregiving “bonuses,” perhaps by asking evaluators to respond to scenarios in which fathers engage in caregiving that removes them from paid work for brief and lengthy times.

Our second conclusion is methodological. This study highlights the importance of examining multiple types of caregiving as well as holding leave-taking constant for the control group. Our findings for men, for example, show that it is not just fathers who receive premia for caregiving but that male elder caregivers receive a similar premium, illustrating the importance of not conflating caregiving and parenting. Likewise, our finding that mothers are not penalized relative to women who take leave for other reasons underscores the importance of examining noncaregivers who also took leave from work, to avoid conflating motherhood and leave-taking. We suggest that future investigations of the motherhood penalty and fatherhood bonus consider a comparison of mothers, nonmothers, fathers, and nonfathers who take leave with leave-taking for a variety of other reasons (e.g., noncombat military service) unrelated to injury, since not being able-bodied, even temporarily, may lead to negative evaluations (Albiston, 2010).

Our third conclusion is related to policy. A more equitable division of household labor is often seen as a key for ameliorating gender inequality, and many countries have seen a push to increase men’s involvement in child care (see Iverson & Rosenbluth, 2010). Our results suggest a more equitable division of family caregiving labor might actually exacerbate inequality, as we find that men who took employment leave for child care and eldercare *increases* their perceived employability. We of course think that it is important for men to share in the second shift, but our results caution against viewing this as a panacea for gender-based labor market inequality.

Scholars stand to gain from including alternate forms of family caregiving in their investigations of the family-work link. Not only do our results demonstrate differences in the reaction of men and women who provide different types of care, but the reality is that in the future, more workers will be engaged in family caregiving that extends beyond parenting. The growth of the “sandwich generation,” which comprises individuals who simultaneously have dependent children and aging parents who require

assistance (see Grundy & Henretta, 2006; Smith, 2004), means that more men and women will face these types of caregiving responsibilities in the future. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has made it clear that employer decision making based on caregiving status is a violation of workers' Title VII rights (EEOC, 2007; Kelly, 2005; J. C. Williams & Bornstein, 2008). Therefore, workers, policy makers, and employers should all be concerned about any influence an individuals' caregiving status has on hiring and other key personnel decisions. Future research should address the growing concern over gender inequality at work by untangling the complex connection between sex, caregiving status, and employment outcomes. Such careful attention to the nexus between family caregiving and paid work for women and men may help revive the stalled progress toward gender equality.

## Appendix

### *Condition Manipulation*

| Condition  | Name                             | Cover Letter   |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| Mother<br>Father   | Jennifer Belson<br>George Belson | "I worked as an organizational employee development consultant for most of the past ten years. I did, however, take leave from work for four months (February-June 2006) to care for my newborn son."  |
| Female elder caregiver<br>Male elder caregiver                   | Jennifer Belson<br>George Belson | "I worked as an organizational employee development consultant for most of the past ten years. I did, however, take leave from work for four months (February-June 2006) to move my elderly parents from Ohio to Minnesota so I could be closer to them in order to assist them with their needs as they age." |
| Female noncaregiver/<br>control<br>Male noncaregiver/<br>control | Jennifer Belson<br>George Belson | "I worked as an organizational employee development consultant for most of the past ten years. I did, however, take leave from work for four months (February-June 2006) to recover from a broken wrist and shoulder injury sustained in an accident."   |

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## Notes

1. Not all fathers benefit equally. Hodges and Budig (2010) found that White, married, college-educated, professional fathers from households with a gender-traditional division of labor received the largest fatherhood premiums.
2. We chose organizational development consultant (ODC) as our target job because the study required a professional job to which it is common for applicants to submit a résumé and cover letter. Second, the study required a job with gender-neutral tasks since we did not want respondents' perceptions of the job's gender type to interfere with their applicant ratings. An ODC engages in a wide variety of work tasks that are not clearly "masculine" or "feminine." For example, an ODC problem solves, redesigns business processes, and does personnel training (see Organizational Development Network, 2011).
3. This is important because these gendered familial premia and penalties vary by race and class. For example, professional, White, married men receive the highest fatherhood pay bonuses (Hodges & Budig, 2010), and the motherhood wage penalty is smallest among mothers at the top of the earnings hierarchy (Budig & Hodges, 2010).
4. Responses are coded as follows: 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, and 1 = *strongly disagree* (except "will not abuse company leave policies," which is coded 6 = *very confident* to 1 = *very unconfident*).
5. It is also possible that this occurs because we are assessing perceived employability into a professional job for a White, middle-class-sounding fictitious applicant. White, professional women are typically less likely to be penalized for motherhood and have been found to have smaller motherhood penalties than women in nonprofessional occupations (Budig & Hodges, 2010). However, given that previous experimental work finds a motherhood penalty in similar circumstances, this seems unlikely to be the sole cause.
6. It is worth noting here that it does not appear to simply be family-related leave-taking that is problematic, as men who take leave for family reasons are perceived as more employable than men who take leave for an injury.

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